On Campus

After 73 Years at Columbia, Keene Retires to Japan

Summer 2011



Donald Keene teaching his final class on April 26, 2011. (Ozier Muhammad / The New York Times / Redux)

Donald Keene, one of the world's foremost scholars and translators of Japanese literature, taught his last class in front of a phalanx of reporters and camera crews in Kent Hall in April. His retirement after teaching at Columbia for 56 years made headlines, especially in Japan, because he'd already announced his intention to seek citizenship and permanently move there.

Following his last seminar, on traditional Noh plays, Keene ’42CC, ’50GSAS told the assembled journalists that the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan had only strengthened his resolve to be among the people whose language and culture he has loved since beginning his studies at Columbia in 1938. “I’ve made up my mind to become a Japanese citizen to be together with the Japanese,” Keene, who is 89, was quoted as saying in the English-language newspaper *Daily Yomiuri*. “I want to live together with these people and share death with them, as I love Japan and believe in Japan.”



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All categories >